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Message Text

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ORIGIN PRS-01

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UNCLAS STATE 191270 TOSEC 080334

FOR HODDING CARTER FROM S/PRS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP, SOPN (VANCE, CYRUS R.)

SUBJECT: FIRST LINE REPORT, MARVIN KALB

SECRETARY VANCE'S TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST IS OVER. OFFI-
CIALS ADMIT DISAPPOINTING RESULTS.

IT WAS JUST A LITTLE MORE THAN THREE WEEKS AGO THAT PRESIDENT CARTER CONCLUDED HIS TALKS WITH MENACHEM BEGIN, THE NEW ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER, AND ALL BUT PREDICTED A GENEVA CONFERENCE IN OCTOBER. "I BELIEVE WE'VE LAID THE GROUNDWORK NOW," HE SAID, "AND BARRING SOME UNFORESEEN DIFFICULTIES THAT WILL LEAD TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE IN OCTOBER." A MINUTE OR SO LATER HE ADDED, "WE SEE THE CONVENING OF THE CONFERENCE AS BEING VERY LIKELY."

IT IS NOW CLEAR AFTER SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE'S TRIP THROUGH THE MIDDLE EAST THAT THE PRESIDENT'S CRYSTAL BALL WAS CLOUDED. THE PROBLEMS THAT FACED THE ADMINISTRATION
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THEN DID NOT DISAPPEAR. THEY PLAGUED THE SECRETARY THROUGHOUT HIS SWIFT TOUR OF KEY MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES, AND THEY CONTINUE TO POSE OBSTACLES TO THE RECONVENING OF A GENEVA CONFERENCE AND THE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT. ARAB LEADERS, NO MATTER HOW MODERATE THEY MAY BE, STILL REFUSE TO DISCUSS THEIR PROBLEMS DIRECTLY WITH ISRAEL; THEY PREFER TO USE THE UNITED STATES AS A

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GO-BETWEEN. THAT MAKES ANY SOLUTION INFINITELY MORE DIFFICULT. THE LEADERS OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION FEINT AND DODGE AND SUGGEST AN UPCOMING CHANGE IN THEIR POSITION TOWARDS UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 242. NOTHING IS DEFINITE BECAUSE NO ONE KNOWS WHAT KIND OF CHANGE THEY HAVE IN MIND -- ONE THAT COULD BE ENDORSED BY THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION WHICH IS EAGER TO OPEN A DIALOGUE WITH THE PLO, OR ONE THAT THE U.S. WOULD HAVE TO REJECT.

FOR ITS PART, THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN RESOLUTELY REFUSES TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE PLO, BRANDING THEM AS "GENOCIDISTS." BEGIN IS PREPARED TO MAKE MAJOR TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS ON THE SINAI AND THE GOLAN FRONTS BUT NOT ON THE WEST BANK. SO FAR THE ARAB LEADERS ARE SHUNNING THE IDEA OF SEPARATE AGREEMENTS WITH ISRAEL, HARDENING THEIR RHETORIC IN THE PROCESS, THE USUAL-LY MILD KING HUSSEIN NOW DESCRIBING THE ISRAELIS AS "RACIST, AGRESSIVE INVADERS." SO LONG AS THEY HOLD OUT FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT, THE ARABS MAY GET NOT PEACE, BUT WAR -- A BITTER RESULT THEY WILL SHARE WITH THE ISRAELIS, WHO ARE SO COMPLETELY ABSORBED WITH THEIR DARK MEMORIES OF THE HITLERITE PAST AND FOUR WARS SINCE 1948 THAT THEY FIND IT EXCRUCIATINGLY DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT ARAB PROFESSIONS OF PEACE AT FACE VALUE.
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SECRETARY VANCE APPROACHED THIS EMOTIONAL TANGLE WITH CONSIDERABLE CARE, SHARING LITTLE OF THE PRESIDENT'S OPTIMISM ABOUT A GENEVA CONFERENCE THIS OCTOBER. THE

SECRETARY UNVEILED SEVERAL AMERICAN IDEAS FOR BREAKING THE IMPASSE, BUT THEY DID NOT SEEM TO HAVE WORKED. NOW, THE ACTION WILL SHIFT TO THE UNITED NATIONS. NEXT MONTH MANY FOREIGN MINISTERS WILL GATHER IN NEW YORK, AND THOSE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST WILL MEET SEPARATELY WITH VANCE AS THEY WOULD HAVE DONE ANYWAY EVEN IF VANCE HAD NOT GONE TO THE MIDDLE EAST.

THE ADMINISTRATION, READY TO SET UP SOME KIND OF DIALOGUE WITH THE PLO, HOPES THAT THE PALESTINIAN LEADERS WILL ACCEPT UN RESOLUTION 242 AND THEN ADD, AS A KIND OF RHETORICAL FLOURISH, THAT THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE DESERVE THE RIGHT OF NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION, A HOMELAND IN PALESTINE. IF THE PLO GOES DOWN THIS ROUTE, IT MAY WIN THE ADMINISTRATION'S ENDORSEMENT, AND THIS IN TURN WOULD SET UP A BLISTERING CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN IN ISRAEL.

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THAT, HOWEVER, WOULD NOT BRING PEACE TO THE MIDDLE EAST, ONLY POLITICAL WARFARE ALONG THE POTOMAC. WHICH IS, OF COURSE, IN NO ONE'S INTEREST. CHRISTOPHER

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